

Entanglements and Detachments in Global Politics

Millennium: Journal of
International Studies
1–4

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DOI: 10.1177/03058298211040164

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**Alice Engelhard, Andy Li
and Enrike van Wingerden** 
London School of Economics and Political Science, UK

The question of how we can grasp entanglements and detachments as researchers who are intimately entangled with the worlds we study was never solely an issue of academic curiosity. This past year we struggled to keep up with the shifting grounds as the global pandemic escalated political crises and generated ruptures and losses in our lives, societies and universities, in ways that touched some more than others. In the midst of this disorientation, we have grappled with and failed to make sense of the politics of the present. Having the space to think through these politics with you and with each-other has meant much more to us than an academic exercise. It has held the space for us to think, feel and make sense together, entangled within a power-laden and at times alienating university system that nevertheless contains the possibility for different, if not better, realities.

The 2020 Millennium conference, ‘Entanglements and Detachments in Global Politics’, held online 22–24 October, was a rich and generative series of conversations, involving over 3,000 registered participants and 150 presentations. Our intention for the conference and this special issue of *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* is to intervene in debates on relationality, which form a necessary, although conservative, corrective to the atomic universe of traditional IR and its deadly international order. Where relational approaches often retain a sense of neatness and order, if not in theory, then in practice, we put forward the urgent need to move even further away from parsimony, into the complex and messy stuff that constitutes our worlds. For some, the entanglement of societies, species and environments has never been about making a comfortable theoretical point. They have always been aware that what is at stake in contesting separation is

Corresponding author:

Enrike van Wingerden, Department of International Relations, London School of Economics and Political Science, Houghton Street, London, WC2A 2AE, UK.

Email: e.van-wingerden@lse.ac.uk

the only possibility of a livable world. In attuning to entanglements and detachments, we intend to further dissolve the illusion of separation that only serves infrastructures of calculation and control at the expense of life itself and it is our dire hope that they continue into a livable future.

The meaning of entanglement is not entirely different from that of relationality, although it carries a different emphasis. Relational theories of political life focus on how (visible and invisible) relations come into being, stabilise, become contested, and break-down over time. A focus on entanglement allows us to examine what things are woven together to enable this web of relations and how these processes take place. To put it differently, entanglement is concerned with how things, human or otherwise, are entangled with each other in themselves. Things such as viruses, human bodies, transportation technologies and vaccine patent regimes are not disparate entities but constitutive of relations within and amongst themselves.

Global politics are fraught with entanglements, between the social and the microbial, bioscience and geopolitics, democracy and despotism, past and present. On one hand, the climate emergency and the importance of human-animal relations exemplified by the emergence of SARS-CoV-2 amplifies the importance of planetary political consciousness. Deforestation, industrial agriculture and changes in local climates, just to name a few, can set in motion political changes as well as creating new reservoirs for infectious diseases. On the other hand, the familiar themes of problems of difference and geopolitics, in their specific historical, geographical and cultural contexts, remain pertinent to lived political realities. The realisation that beings, objects and discourses are so intimately entangled with one another is far more than a theoretical insight, it is a deadly reality.

As we rethink or dissolve the boundaries between human and nature, the international and the local or the anthropocentric and the geological, invariably the dissolution of binaries raises more questions than it answers. Indeed, the connectedness and complexity of the ongoing global pandemic, anti-racist protests, and environmental degradation have put into question the parsimony and abstraction of academic theories. However, not all things are entangled at all times. Societies, species, and substances may not yet, not entirely, or no longer be related or commensurate with one another. In addition, it may be possible that they ought not to be. 'Detachment' explores the limits of entanglement by considering the realm of the nonrelational and the ways of being that are foreclosed when entangled realities materialize. The ambition behind the 2020 Millennium conference was to deepen reflection on what these entanglements, and by implication, detachments, mean for theoretical, methodological, and empirical practice in international studies.

By attuning to detachments, this issue explores that which is passive, dormant and dead, or simply not responsive, comprehensible, or possible to convey to (particular groups of) humans. Such an approach opens up differentiations within relations by acknowledging the spectrum that lies between complete lack of connection and actual intersubjectivity. Detachment does not equate to a lack of care, but as the contributors explore in this volume, becomes part of an intentional ethics of (dis)connecting, or connecting differently, with other forms of life and matter in global politics.

Thinking entanglements and detachments together in this volume opens up a series of tensions between emphasising the complex ‘whole’ and inquiring into a no-less complex singularity. For instance, how do we reconcile seeing human beings as ontologically entangled with the ‘environment’ with power dynamics amongst and between different human groups? What are the analytical limits of privileging connectivity or relationality? How do we detach things that are entangled to heed to the plurality of lifeworlds, species, objects and subjects without subsuming them within the schema of human-centric power politics? The 2020 Millennium conference was intended as a space to ask these questions and resist easy answers.

The interventions in this special issue approach these questions in a range of registers and in conversation with one another. All of these interventions are attuned to the messiness, nuances and constraints of entangled worlds. Several articles trace empirical routes and histories of political entanglements across time and space. Addressing entanglements of capitalism and seafarers, the keynote by Laleh Khalili connects the histories of trans-Atlantic slave trade with forms of contemporary migration and carcerality at sea. Exploring the question of how ideas move, Karin Narita traces how the travelling political theory of Jose Ortega Y Grasset took on new meaning and significance among post-war Japanese radical conservative thinkers. Unpacking aesthetic and embodied entanglements, Katharina Krause shows how images of the protection suit during the Ebola epidemic in West Africa shape the health-security nexus by connecting the bodies of patients, health workers and distant spectators.

Other articles engage the question of how we discuss and theorise entanglements and detachments, identifying the paths and limitations for contemporary international studies. Debbie Lisle offers a speculative lexicon of entanglements that acts as a point of entry into studying entanglements which is itself incomplete and emergent in its approach. Pablo Orellana questions the very limit of academic engagement with entanglements and detachments as a source of decolonial emancipation. Chengxin Pan reclaims the notion of ‘substance’ within relational thought by theorising the dual and inseparable nature of substance-relation through whole-part entanglement. In addition to conceptualising entanglements and detachments, these articles place the relations between researchers and our research into the frame. In this vein, Caitlin Biddolph interrogates researchers’ emotional entanglements with digital archives, specifically the archives of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), and centres an ethics of care in reading and interpreting testimonies of trauma.

Finally, in ‘Tales of Entanglement’, Jenny Edkins, Aida Hozic, Julio César Díaz Calderón, Naeem Inayatullah, Himadeep Muppidi, Robbie Shilliam and Olivia Rutazibwa share a collection of stories that convey the emergence of entangled worlds in ways that exceed traditional boundaries of academic work.

Thank you to the authors, the peer reviewers, and the deputy editors for the collaborative effort of cultivating the work presented here. A huge thank you also goes to the whole conference team, especially the conference organisers, Elena Christaki-Hedrick and Atharva Deshmukh and all the stewards who made the first-ever online Millennium conference such a great success. We remain deeply grateful to the community of scholars whose generosity with their work, time, ideas, advice and care is the foundation of this

special issue and of the conditions that make the continuous and entangled threads of ongoing academic conversation and collaboration possible.

We hope you will enjoy engaging with this collection of thought-provoking interventions as much as we have enjoyed editing it.

Alice Engelhard, Andy Li and Enrike van Wingerden
Editors, Vol. 49

ORCID iD

Enrike van Wingerden  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5703-2025>